

Eskers Provincial Park
**MASTER
PLAN**

Prepared by
Northern B.C. Region
Prince George, B.C.



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NORTHERN B.C. REGION

Ministry of
Parks

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MEMORANDUM

To: J.N. Masselink
Assistant Deputy Minister
Ministry of Parks
Victoria

Date: Sept. 1, 1989

File: 2-4-1-166

SUBJECT: ESKERS PARK MASTER PLAN

I am pleased to submit the Eskers Park Master Plan for your review and approval.

Struan Robertson
Regional Director
Northern B.C. Region

Recommended:

District Manager

Recommended:

Director,
Planning and
Conservation
Services

Approval:

Assistant Deputy Minister

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Plan Highlights

1. Eskers Provincial Park is a new Class A park, located just 40 minutes from Prince George. Once developed, this park will provide opportunities for hiking, strolling, mountain biking, canoeing, swimming, fishing, cross-country skiing, nature interpretation and primitive walk-in camping.
2. The residents of the Prince George area and representatives from special interest groups have contributed to the plans for how best to develop and manage this park.
3. Eskers Park is zoned Intensive Recreation at four separate high use areas. The rest of the park, more than three quarters of the total area, is zoned Natural Environment. Most of Eskers Park will be left natural.
4. The park's topography and natural resources makes it an ideal setting to provide visitors with a variety of relaxing outdoor, family oriented activities. Eskers Park will, for the most part, be a place for people to escape from the mechanized world. Therefore, no trail-bikes, ATV's, gasoline boat motors, or snowmobiles will be allowed in the park.
5. A road (partially constructed to Pine Marsh and Camp Lake) will be constructed to Kathie Lake when funding is available. This will provide access for the general public, seniors, and special needs people to the interior of the park.
6. Facilities such as trails for hiking/skiing, portaging and mountain biking, picnic shelters, interpretation signage, wharves, picnic tables, and parking lots will be added to the park in phases as funding becomes available.
7. Horseback riding will not be allowed in the northern part of the park where steep sided esker ridges are located, and are comprised of easily disturbed loose gravel and sand. This activity may be allowed in the south part of the park, only if a separate horse trail is constructed.

- 8.** Local interest groups, clubs, organizations and schools may be involved in the development of the park when appropriate. The intent is to involve as much as possible, the local community in providing facilities for Special Needs people, environmental education and nature interpretation, ski trails, and wildlife enhancement and protection. This type of grassroots involvement will foster local interest for Eskers Park.

Park Role

Introduction

Eskers Provincial Park is one of the province's newest Class A parks, established in December 1987. Covering over 1600 hectares of rolling terrain and numerous small lakes, the area conserves a portion of the 40 kilometre long Stuart River Eskers Complex.

Eskers Park is destined to become popular because it has exceptional potential for a variety of outdoor activities, and is only a 40 minute drive from Prince George. A road from North Ness Lake Road to Kathie Lake is under construction, and a trail from Pine Marsh to Kathie Lake has been roughed in. These improvements make the park more accessible, and use has already increased significantly as a result of them.

Input from people of the Prince George area will continue to play an important part in determining what activities will be promoted in the Eskers, and how the park should be developed (details of the public input into the planning process are in the appendix). The goal is for Eskers Park to become a part of the Prince George lifestyle: a place to relax, to appreciate nature, to pursue recreation interests, and a place to enjoy the outdoors.

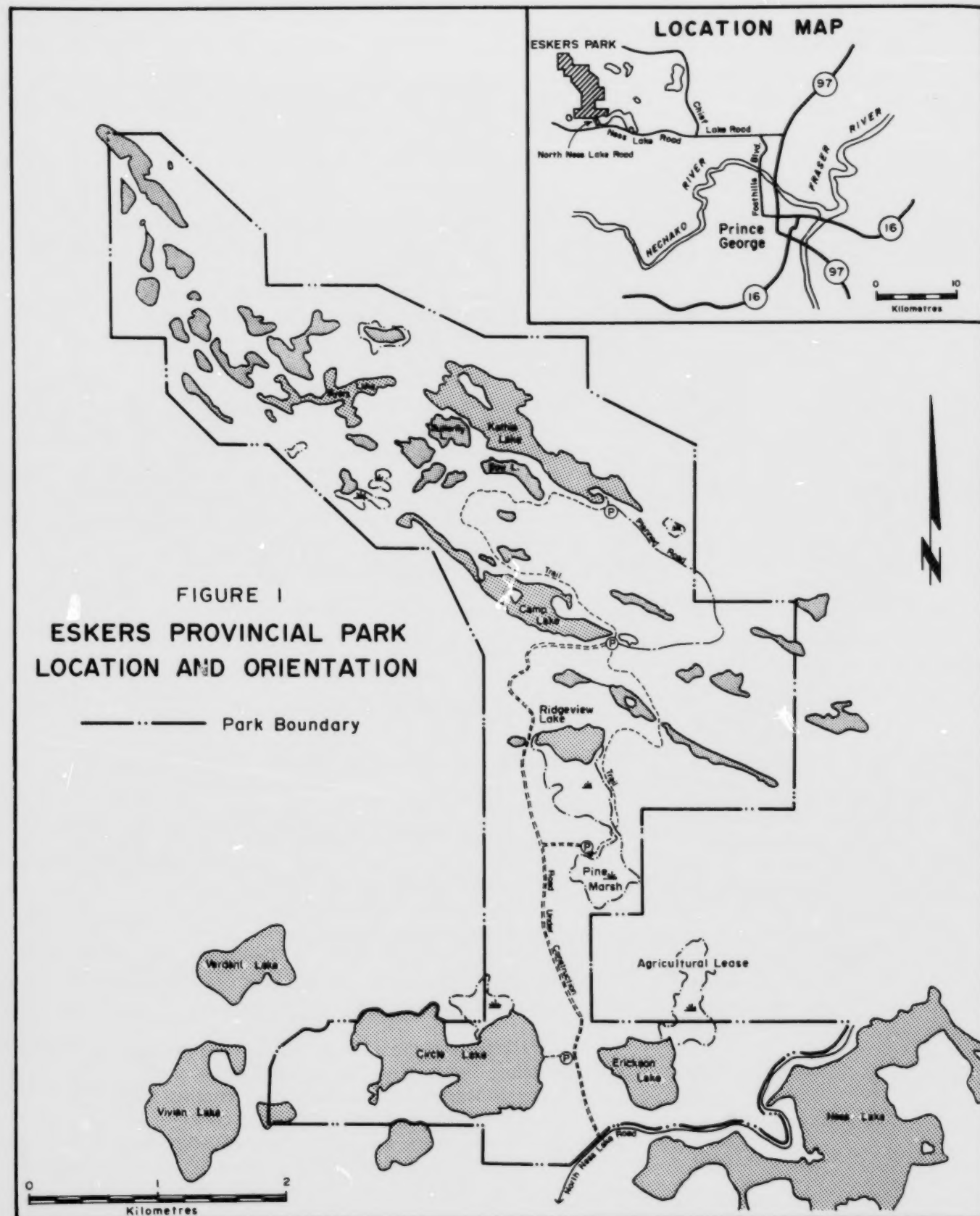
Role of the Park

A. Regional and Provincial Context

Eskers has two interconnecting purposes: i) to conserve a portion of a regionally significant natural feature, and; ii) to provide a range of recreation opportunities in a natural setting.

B. Conservation Role

- Approximately one third of the Stuart River Eskers Complex is within the park boundary. This complex is one of the largest features of its kind in the Fraser Basin and Plains Regional Landscape.
- The Park protects the unique landscape associated with the rolling topography of the eskers. Open, grassy, south facing slopes with mature Douglas fir contrast with north facing slopes of thick immature forest cover, creating a diverse natural landscape. The landscape has



further significance owing to its numerous small lakes and marshes and associated wildlife.

○ Associated with the conservation role, is the role that the Eskers will play in local education. Both the College of New Caledonia and School District 57 will benefit from using Eskers Park as an outdoor classroom. Students could study subjects ranging from aquatic insects to field ecology, wildlife and geomorphology.

C. Recreation Role

○ The Park is well suited to outdoor recreation activities including: hiking, cross-country skiing, fishing, backcountry camping, picnicking, canoeing, nature interpretation, photography and mountain biking.

○ Eskers Provincial Park provides a natural setting to enjoy relaxing family type outdoor recreation pursuits. Special Needs people, seniors and others who want to stay close to their vehicles will also find plenty to do in the park. Eskers Park is within a 40 minute drive from Prince George, and will serve primarily that market area.

○ Eskers Park will contribute to local tourism by encouraging tourists already in this area, to stay a while longer.

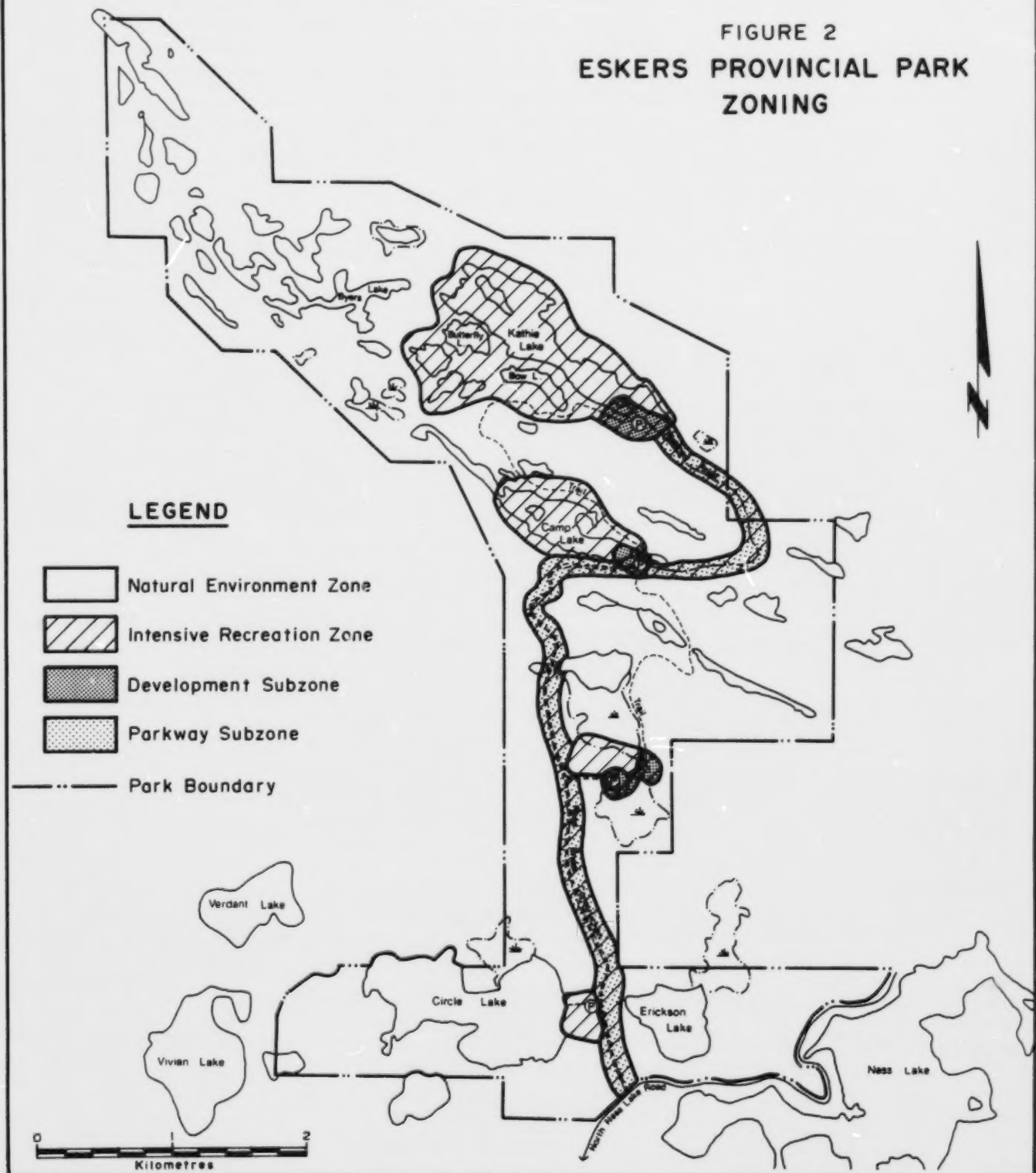
This park will undoubtedly become a popular attraction, because it has the potential to host so many different types of activities. Eventually, Eskers Park will become a part of the Prince George lifestyle.

Zoning

Zoning is used to indicate the type of development and recreation use and the type of atmosphere that is appropriate in the different areas of the Park. Within Eskers Park, there are two distinct units that will be managed according to their appropriate zoning designations.

The **Intensive Recreation Zone** covers areas of the Park directly accessible by public road within which the most heavily visited, developed and managed parts of the Park are located. Sub-zones include:

FIGURE 2
ESKERS PROVINCIAL PARK
ZONING



Development

Providing concentrations of visitor facilities.

Parkway

To accommodate the scenic access road to Kathie Lake.

The **Natural Environment Zone** covers areas of the Park which experience moderate levels of use and provides for a variety of accessible off-road outdoor recreation activities in a largely undisturbed natural environment. Facilities are at a level to satisfy user needs and concentrate use to protect the overall environment of the Park.

Natural Resources Management Objectives and Policies

The objective is to manage the natural resources to ensure protection and diversity of the environment in perpetuity.

A. Land Tenures, Occupancy Rights

Leases and Use Permits: None; however, a Park Use Permit (PUP) will be issued to formalize access rights to leased agricultural property, east of the park. The lease predates the establishment of the park, and there is no other suitable route to the property. See Figure 1 for location of leased property.

Fee Simple Lands: None

Traplines: The Park contains portions of four trapline territories (715T002, 715T003, 715T013 and 714T010). One territory (714T010) has an active trapline within the park boundaries.

Trapping is a non-recreational, commercial resource use that is inappropriate in a Class A park. The Division will acquire the portions of the trapline territories that are within the park when they become available.

Hunting/Big Game Outfitters: Eskers Park is affected by one registered guiding territory; however, hunting is incompatible with planned development for Eskers Park. The park will be closed to hunting and B.C. Parks will acquire the portion of the guiding territory that is within the park.

Trespasses: None

Adjoining Land Uses and Tenures: Privately owned land, leases, and Provincial Forest Lands surround Eskers Park. Land uses will be monitored to determine if any management actions are required to protect the park. For example, a forestry access road constructed near the boundary of the park could lead to an unwanted access route into the park. Liaison with the Fraser-Fort George Regional District and the Ministry of Forests will be continued to monitor land uses around the park.

Park Management

B. Water

Water is an important ingredient in the composition of Eskers Park. Small lakes, ponds and marshes exist between almost every ridge. The Park protects over forty small lakes and ponds; most of them unnamed.

The objective will be to ensure that facilities and activities do not impair the quality or quantity of water in Eskers Park. Uses of water, other than for the purposes of park management or small-scale fish or wildlife management projects will not be allowed. Surface waters are unfit for human consumption and will be advertised as such. As well, many of the water bodies will be given names to allow better orientation of the park visitor.

Drinking water will be available for park visitors at designated spots.

C. Vegetation

Vegetation contributes to the natural character of the Park. North facing slopes are generally wetter, hosting thick immature stands of forest and moderate levels of understory. South facing slopes, on the other hand, are generally more open, with grassy understory and some large Douglas fir trees. Dense pockets of Aspen are found in some pockets between esker ridges.

As well as providing visitors with a natural setting, vegetation is also important to wildlife populations.

The objective is to manage the vegetation to allow a naturally evolving ecosystem while protecting wildlife values and retaining vegetative resources of visual, recreational or ecological importance. The forest will also be managed to ensure protection of valuable resources outside the park.

All wildfire in the park will be attacked to ensure safety of park visitors, facilities and resources, and residents outside of the park. As well, the Ministry will work towards eradicating diseased or infested trees which pose a threat to the park's forest. To this end, trees that pose a significant safety hazard, or a threat to healthy trees may be removed. No commercial forest use will be permitted in this Class A Park.

D. Wildlife

Eskers Park provides a habitat for primarily moose, deer, black bear, beaver, squirrels, grouse, ducks, geese and numerous birds.

The objective is to maintain the present mix of wildlife species primarily for their inherent value as well as for viewing.

It is expected that some moose and deer will move out of the park area as trail development and visitor use increases. Efforts will be made to limit the impact of recreation on wildlife, by identifying and avoiding if possible, important or sensitive areas.

Wildlife viewing, especially involving beaver, moose, waterfowl and birds will be promoted, and some lookouts will be provided for this purpose. During the early phases of developing Eskers Park, a high priority will be given to facilities for interpreting the beaver and its habitat. There will be opportunities for school and youth groups to undertake certain habitat enhancement projects. For example, Ducks Unlimited could show school groups how to construct, set and monitor nesting boxes for ducks.

Signing will be used to warn visitors of possible bear encounters, primarily in backcountry camping areas. Elevated caches will be constructed at these camping areas.

E. Fish

There is no natural recreational fishery within the park, and most lakes do not provide suitable spawning areas. As such, a stocking program for some lakes is required to maintain a successful fishery.

In 1986 and 1987, Kathie Lake and Camp Lake were both stocked with 5,000 Rainbow Trout each, by the Fish and Wildlife Branch. As well, in June 1988, Byers, Butterfly and Bow lake were stocked with Brook trout. Most other lakes will not be stocked, and will be left in their natural state.

The objective is to provide a variety of angling opportunities, and to ensure that fish populations are

maintained at suitable levels. The Ministry with the assistance of the Fish and Wildlife Branch will manage the fishery via an ongoing stocking program, catch limits, fish habitat enhancement and fishing regulations.

F. Geological Features

The esker ridge complex within the park is a significant geological feature which contains an abundance of loosely packed gravel, interlayered with sections of fine sands and silts. **It will be the objective to minimize disturbance of the esker materials when construction of trails occurs.**

No removal of sand or gravel from the park will be allowed. Trail locations will avoid as much as possible, areas that have unstable slopes, and trail surfacing will be needed where sands and silts are exposed.

Where possible, trails will be developed to take advantage of the esker ridges; viewpoints and a variety of grades will be an integral part of the trail system. The geological processes that formed the eskers will be considered for interpretative signing.

G. Cultural Resources

The park contains no documented archeological or historic features. There are, however, interesting settlement records of the Nukko Lake area near the Park. This historical interest will be promoted through naming of many of the Park's lakes after early settlers.

H. Research

It will be the objective to allow, under permit, research for scientific fields and school projects if it will increase our understanding of the resources in the park. No destructive resource use will be allowed pertaining to this objective.

Visitor Services Objectives and Policies

I. Introduction

Eskers Park is within a forty minute drive of a 65,000 plus market area comprising Greater Prince George. The Park's topography and natural resources makes it ideal for providing this market area with a variety of relaxing outdoor, family oriented, activities. Eskers Park will, for the most part, be a place for people to escape from the mechanized world. Therefore, no trail-bikes, ATVs, gasoline boat motors, or snowmobiles will be allowed in the park.

The general objectives are:

- ☐ to provide a road to Kathie Lake;
- ☐ to provide a range of outdoor recreation activities within a natural setting;
- ☐ to provide accessible areas of the park for seniors and special needs people;
- ☐ to provide visitors with information on the park and its resources, and;
- ☐ to allow certain areas of the park to be utilized for outdoor education purposes.

J. Visitor Opportunities (refer to figure 3)

- ☐ Short Walks

The objective will be to provide some trails near parking areas, with hard surfaces and shallow grades to permit access by young families, seniors and special needs people.

Loop trails of this nature will be developed within the Intensive Recreation Zone, and coordinated with other activities (fishing, canoeing, picnicking, interpretation) accessible for seniors and special needs people.

- ☐ Hiking

The objective will be to provide hiking ranging from easy, well marked trails, to more difficult trails into backcountry areas. Parts of the Park will have no

formal trails. Hikers will have the opportunity to enjoy short trips or over-night hikes.

The best hiking area is the central and northern part of Eskers Park. In these areas, small lakes and ponds are plentiful, the topography is rolling and the forest is most scenic and diverse. As such, most of the trail development will be in this area of greatest potential. Hiking trails will also lead visitors to fishing and picnicking spots, lookouts, interpretive displays, wildlife viewing areas, and backcountry camping areas. Trails will be located so that in most instances, hikers on one trail will not see or hear hikers on another trail. The rolling topography of the park makes this objective achievable.

○ **Horseback Riding**

Horseback riding will not be allowed in the northern part of the park (north of Pine Marsh). The landscape in this area is hilly, with steep sided eskers ridges comprised of loosely packed sand and gravel. Horse traffic over this type of landscape would damage sections of the trails, and reduce the quality of the trails for hikers. A trail may be built in the Erikson Lake area, away from other users, only if there is significant interest. No horses will be allowed in the park until such a trail is built.

○ **Motorboating**

No gasoline engine powered boats will be allowed on any of the lakes in the park. Small electric motors will be allowed on Kathie and Camp Lakes only. The allowance of electric motors is primarily intended to make boating activities more accessible to seniors and special needs people.

○ **Canoeing**

The objective is to provide day and overnight canoeing opportunities for primarily beginner and intermediate canoeists. Canoeing will contribute to other activities including wildlife viewing, fishing, backcountry camping and hiking.

Most of the lakes are small; however, short portage trails will provide access through a chain of lakes extending almost 5 kilometres into the northwestern reaches of the park. Eskers Park will provide an ideal place for families to learn backcountry canoeing skills. A backcountry camping area will be available for canoeists, and shared with hikers.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN MAP: Phases One and Two

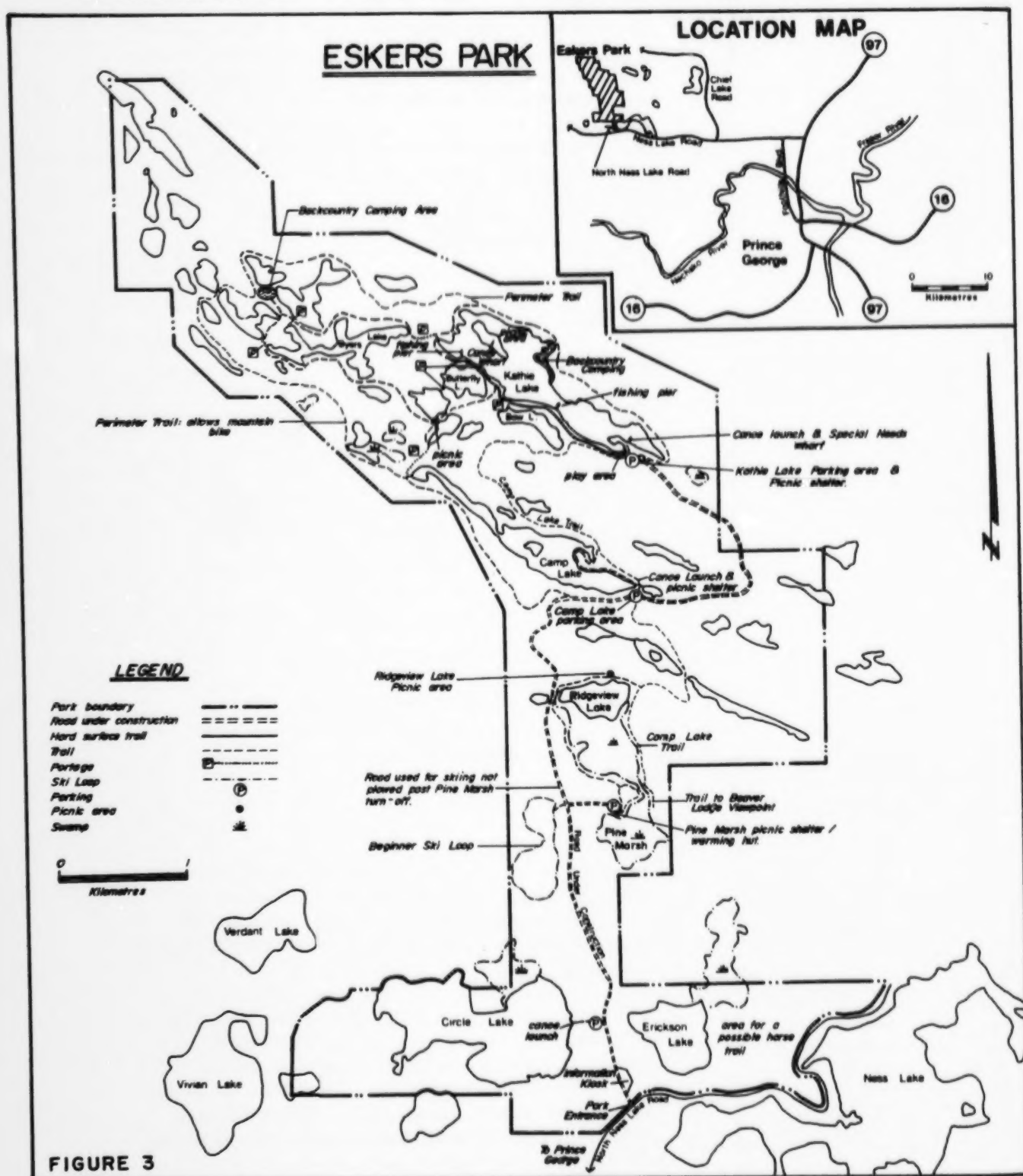


FIGURE 3

Canoe launches will be available at Kathie, Camp and Circle Lakes, and parking will be provided near each launch. Special wharves will be provided to make it easier for Special Needs People to get in and out of small boats. As well, canoe rests will be provided to assist canoeists during portages.

The islands in Kathie and Camp Lakes will provide picnic spots within easy reach for family canoeists.

○ Backcountry Camping

Limited backcountry camping will be provided separately for groups and individuals pursuing hiking, canoeing, skiing, or mountain biking.

A couple of areas will be investigated for this purpose: one on the north shore of Kathie Lake, and an area in the northern interior of the park (refer to figure 3).

○ Angling

The objective is to provide a variety of angling opportunities for different types of users.

BC Parks with the assistance of the Fish and Wildlife Branch, will provide fishing opportunities for Rainbow Trout and Brook Trout for a limited number of lakes. Fishing piers will be provided for special needs people. The piers will be available to anyone, but priority will be given to special needs people.

Some lakes will have piers constructed for flyfishing. The generally steep banks of most lakes would make back casting difficult without a pier.

Angling, whether from a canoe, the lakeshore, or a pier will be promoted for some lakes in Eskers Park. However, careful monitoring of this put-and-take fishery is critical to its maintenance. Catch limits and other regulations will be used to maintain suitable numbers of fish in the lakes.

○ Mountain Biking

The objective is to provide a trail that will allow mountain biking while avoiding conflicts with other park activities.

Mountain biking (non-motorized) will be allowed on the perimeter trail. Signs will be posted to educate both hikers and bikers on how to safely share the perimeter trail. The location of the perimeter trail will be chosen after detailed field survey.

○ **Hunting**

The objective is not to allow hunting in Eskers Provincial Park. Given its small size, year-round use, and expected high numbers of visitors throughout the park, hunting would not be suitable in the park.

It will be a high priority to acquire that portion of the Big Game Guiding territory within Eskers Park. No hunting will be allowed in the park.

○ **Day-Use Recreation**

It will be the objective to provide a variety of family oriented, day-use, outdoor recreation activities, in a natural setting.

Picnicking, a children's play area and short self-guiding interpretation trails will be developed and promoted within the Intensive Recreation Zone of the park. Camp and Kathie Lakes will provide an "old fashioned swimming hole," with swimming areas left largely in their natural state. Picnic areas will be located at various locations in the park, and picnic shelters will be constructed at Pine Marsh and Kathie Lake. Grassy areas under the trees will be provided near picnic areas.

○ **Outdoor Education and Interpretation**

It will be the objective to provide facilities which can be used as outdoor classrooms.

Teachers will have the opportunity to educate students in the field about various aspects of nature and ecology. The picnic shelter at Pine Marsh will also be used for displaying interpretive signs highlighting the park's features, and as a meeting area for school and youth groups. Nature trails and wildlife viewing areas will add to the outdoor education experience.

Interpretive signs will be placed throughout the park where needed. Although interpretive signs will benefit everyone, school groups will find them particularly useful. BC Parks will work with the School District to provide a useful and interesting atmosphere for outdoor education. School and youth groups will have the opportunity to become involved in some small projects, such as building and monitoring nesting boxes, or helping with a children's interpretive trail.

○ Winter Recreation

The objective is to provide and promote non-motorized winter recreation opportunities. Eskers Park is ideally suited to cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. Hiking trails will be designed to offer cross-country skiing opportunities in the winter. The access road north of Pine Marsh will be part of the ski trail system, and a short beginner loop near the Pine Marsh parking lot has been marked for skiers. Picnic shelters at Pine Marsh, and Camp and Kathie Lakes will be used as warming huts.

An area will be identified for winter backcountry camping, and a small shelter will be provided. Ice fishing will be allowed in the park, but will not be actively promoted. Signs will be displayed warning skiers, and people snowshoeing and ice-fishing of the dangers when travelling out on to frozen lakes or ponds.

No snowmobiling will be allowed in the park.

K. Recreation Services

Owing to the park's small size, it is not appropriate to encourage recreation guiding, or equipment rental in Eskers Park. There is not expected to be any demand for guiding, and some equipment rental is provided by business in the Prince George area.

The people of Prince George have strongly expressed (during the open house process) that private operators should be kept out of Eskers Park, and that a relaxed and natural atmosphere be retained. In keeping with this concept, no concession stands will be allowed to operate in the park.

B.C. Parks will encourage services that provide group transportation between Prince George and Eskers Park. This type of service would most benefit seniors and special needs people, who might not have their own transportation.

L. Management Services

Headquarters

Staff will manage this park from the Prince George District Office. A small service yard may be located in the park if warranted.

☐ **Park Management**

The primary emphasis will be on maintaining the trails, facilities and day-use area within the park, on a year-round basis. Security patrols will be used as required.

☐ **Community Involvement**

BC Parks will seek the assistance of recreation clubs to monitor park use and advise of problems. When appropriate, local clubs and groups will be invited to assist with specific facility or trail projects.

BC Parks will promote active involvement of groups in the development of Eskers Park. Some examples of projects that the public could be directly involved in include:

- ☐ Naturalist club or school groups constructing and maintaining nesting boxes with the guidance of Ducks Unlimited.
- ☐ Have school construction classes build wharves for the Special Needs people.
- ☐ Local ski clubs could build a warming shelter at Camp Lake.
- ☐ Naturalist club could construct wildlife viewing platforms, towers or blinds.
- ☐ Service clubs could assist in providing facilities for Special Needs people.

- Wildlife groups could assist with fishery enhancement projects.
- Special Needs Advisory Committee of the City of Prince George could assist in the design of special facilities such as fishing piers, hard-surface trails and canoe launches, and interpretive texts or audio tapes for the blind.

M. Information Services

- General Strategy

The objective is to enhance the visitor's enjoyment by providing in-park information that will orient visitors to the recreation opportunities available, explain the park features, and encourage user safety.

- Orientation

Park visitors will be made aware of recreation facilities primarily by signs. Park brochures and staff will also help to orient the visitor. Information shelters will be provided at Pine Marsh, at the Kathie Lake parking area, and at the park entrance. Trail signs and markers will be used throughout the park.

- Interpretation

Self-guiding nature trails will be developed, and pamphlets will be available to supplement the information on the interpretive signs. An Interpretive Plan will be done for Eskers Park. Subjects available for interpretation include:

- post-glacial processes and the formation of kames and eskers;
- forest ecology;
- wildlife in the park;
- the beaver pond;
- marsh plants and aquatic insect ecology;
- waterfowl nesting sites.

- Safety

Potential dangers associated with bears, becoming lost, or traversing frozen ponds will be brought to the public's attention through park brochures and signs.

N. Marketing

○ General Strategy

The objective is to encourage people to enjoy a range of recreation activities at a level of use that will not threaten the conservation objectives of the park.

The strategy will be to appeal to a wide cross-section of the Prince George market by offering a variety of activities which may involve time commitments ranging from part of a day to overnight.

Promotion will focus on a combination of recreation activities available in the park, for example hiking and fishing and backcountry camping, and will be aimed at specific segments of the public.

Promotion will also be aimed at visitors to the Prince George area. The intent will be to encourage tourists who are already in the area, to stay a while longer, by offering them another opportunity. The Greater Prince George Visitor and Convention Bureau, local campgrounds and hotels and motels will be approached to promote Eskers Park.

○ Product Lines

Recreation activities or "packages" that are to be promoted fall into two groups, described as follows:

Group A

- primarily day users
- involves seniors, families and special needs people
- generally involves a relaxing outing

Activities

- fishing
- canoeing
- walking
- interpretation
- picnicking
- novice/beginner cross-country skiing

Group B

- either day use or overnight use
- involves active families, singles and empty nesters
- either relaxing or active for the fit and keen

Activities

- canoeing/canoeing circuit/portaging
- walking/hiking
- mountain biking
- all levels of cross-country skiing/snowshoeing
- interpretation
- picnicking

There is the potential, at Eskers Park, to meet the needs of people wanting a relaxing half day outing, or more active people that want to challenge themselves.

○ Theme Days

Eskers Park is close enough to Prince George to consider "Theme Days" as a method of promoting use in the park. BC Parks will promote and encourage clubs to sponsor special days at the park for particular groups. The Special Needs people, seniors, and youth groups would especially benefit from this type of activity.

Development Plan

The construction of facilities at Eskers Park will be done in phases, so that the overall development of the park is carefully planned and executed. BC Parks is committed to facility development that is compatible with both the natural setting of the park, as well as the number and type of park users. Prioritizing of projects early in the planning phase will help to keep the development process in balance; *ie.* the extent of trail development or number of pit toilets will be balanced with the number of park users.

There are four different groups of facility development planned for Eskers Park:

- Vehicle access, signs and parking.
- Trails and day-use facilities.
- Backcountry camping facilities.
- Park management and public safety facilities.

The timing of development will be governed by what funding is available, but the Development Plan lays out the sequence for projects.

Phase One

The initial phase will be directed towards actions that are of the highest priority, and will be undertaken within the short-term (1 - 3 years) as funds allow. Projects will be focussed towards constructing vehicle and recreation access routes, facilities for interpretation, and information signing.

- Undertake detailed site-plans for the main development areas at Kathie Lake and at Pine Marsh.
- Complete a public road from the park entrance off North Ness Lake Road to Kathie Lake; a distance of approximately 7 kilometres. Parking lots will be constructed at Circle Lake, Pine Marsh, Camp Lake, and Kathie Lake. (started 1988)
- Complete a 6 kilometre intermediate ski/hiking trail from Pine Marsh, via the Camp Lake parking area, to Kathie Lake. (roughed-in 1988, needs extensive upgrading before it is suitable for skiing)
- Construct a high-use, hard surface trail in the Kathie Lake area.

- Design and construct a picnic/warming shelter for Pine Marsh. This structure will be used by cross-country skiers, picnickers, and to display interpretive signs.
- Construct a picnic shelter/warming hut at Kathie Lake. Clear an area for a grassy play area, and install a playground.
- Construct a small picnic shelter at Camp Lake.
- Place pit toilets at Pine Marsh and Camp Lake.
- Construct a toilet building/sewage disposal system/water system at Kathie Lake.
- Construct a lockable gate at the entrance to Eskers Park. (completed 1988) An information shelter will also be placed near the entrance for visitor orientation.
- Park orientation, interpretation and information signs will be placed throughout the park where needed.
- The trail system will be expanded to include a trail suitable for special needs people. Also, trails will be constructed to viewpoints, lakes and ponds, and special interpretive areas, and the perimeter trail will be started.
- Attempt to acquire existing rights to Big Game Guiding and trapping. Close the park to hunting. (initiated process 1988)
- Undertake a Fisheries Management Plan for the park.
- Remove the trapper's cabin at Kathie Lake, subject to investigation of ownership and tenure. (completed 1988)
- Construct some portage trails between interior lakes. (started 1988)
- Construct fishing piers, and canoe wharves for Kathie Lake and Camp Lake
- Visitor Services section will complete an Interpretive Plan.

- A service yard location will be designated.
- Drinking water will be provided at Pine Marsh.

Phase Two

The secondary phase of development involves increasing the level of facility development to broaden the variety of opportunities, and to handle increased numbers of visitors. Projects will be phased into the short to medium time frame (3 - 5 years).

- Expand the trail system to include more variety of ski and hiking trails. Trails will be constructed to appeal to the demands of visitors.
- A perimeter trail will be constructed to facilitate mountain biking.
- Additional portage trails will be constructed, and canoe rests will be placed where warranted.
- Two backcountry camping areas will be designated and constructed: one area on the northeast shore of Kathie Lake, and the other in the northern section of the park.
- Additional picnic areas will be located at various locations, including the islands in Kathie and Camp Lakes.
- Construct additional fishing piers and canoe wharves.

Phase Three

The tertiary phase involves actions that are intended to fulfill the medium to long term goals and objectives for Eskers Provincial Park. These items are listed in the tertiary phase because they are not immediately important; however, they may be implemented at any time, when appropriate.

- Have a hydro power line constructed from North Ness Lake Road to Pine Marsh.

- Pave the public roadway from the park entrance to Kathie Lake.
- Construct a small, rustic camping shelter at the northern backcountry camping area, that will be suitable for winter camping.
- Carry out wildlife enhancement projects for birds, waterfowl, beaver, and other mammals.

Eskers Provincial Park
**MASTER
PLAN**

Background Document

Eskers Master Plan Background Document

Introduction

Eskers Park protects and conserves a system of sinuous ridges, called eskers, and its associated biological communities. The numerous lakes and ponds, varied landscapes, and diverse plant communities found within the park, make the area significant for recreation.

Located 50 km. northwest of Prince George, the park provides area residents with outdoor recreation opportunities ranging from hiking and canoeing to picnicking and nature interpretation. In this regard, the park supplements the regional recreation opportunities provided by West Lake (20 km. south of Prince George), and therefore, contributes to satisfying the Ministry's regional goals and objectives. Further, it complements the Ness Lake Regional District Park that is contiguous with a portion of the southern boundary of the provincial park.

The primary constraint affecting park use and development is the lack of an acceptable public access road. Field assessment has resulted in a number of options for access to either the east or west side of the park. However, the suitability of Kathie Lake (near the east boundary) as the focus point of park development, and the favorable topography along the east side of the park, provides justification for favouring an eastern access road.

Although the Ministry has been interested in the park area for a number of years, it was not designated a Class A, category 6 park until 1987. As such, recreational development in the park is virtually non-existent. Given the surplus of campsites in the Prince George area, development will be directed towards day-use oriented facilities and services.

The park, comprising approximately 1600 hectares, has rolling topography, typical of a braided-esker landscape. The ridges of the eskers are oriented northwest-southeast, and the slopes on either side of the ridges are generally moderately steep with ponds, lakes or marshes in most valley bottoms.

The vegetation is typical of the Prince George area, with a predominant mixture of aspen, lodgepole pine, and Douglas fir, and some Spruce in the southern reaches of the park. The climate associated with the park is also

typical of the region, with cool to cold temperatures and moderate to heavy snowfall in the winter, and reasonably warm, dry summers. The park is suited for summer and winter activities such as hiking, fishing, canoeing, skiing, picnicking, and nature appreciation.

Natural and Cultural Resources

Natural Resources

○ Geomorphology

The park conserves and protects a portion of a significant geomorphological feature of glacial origin within the Nechako Plateau Regional Landscape of the Interior Plateaus and Valleys Natural Region. The entire feature, referred to as the Stuart River Compound Esker Formation (S. Holland 1964) is over 40 km. long and averages 3 km. in width. About one third is within the park.

In general, most eskers and esker complexes are oriented parallel or sub-parallel to the direction of the glacier movement. The main exception is the Stuart River Esker Complex which takes a course that is, in places, almost perpendicular to the direction of ice movement.

The esker complexes were usually formed in meltwater channels that were first excavated by the glacial ice movement. The meltwater channels may have been either open channels between ice walls, enormous tunnels beneath the ice, large channels in the till beyond the ice margin, or a combination of all three causes. Geomorphologists believe that the formation of the ridges began when large blocks of ice were separated from the glacier, settled into the meltwater channels, and were subsequently buried by sand and gravel deposits. When the ice later melted, large water-filled depressions, called kettles, were formed, separated and enclosed by the esker ridges.

The soils within the park are mainly comprised of degraded dystric brunisols, being gravelly and sandy, coarse to moderately coarse textured, glacio-fluvial esker deposits. The soils forming the esker ridges are subject to occasional slumping. To a lesser

degree, Brunisolic Gray Luvisols are also present within the overburden of the park. These are described as silty glacial lake deposits which vary from several tens of feet in thickness to shallow deposits (less than five feet) over glacial till. These soils are generally medium to moderately fine textured, with a predominant silicate composition.

Drainage in this area is moderate to rapid, depending on the slope, but poor in depressions. There tends to be slight runoff with rapid internal drainage.

Water Resources

The largest water-body in the park is Kathie Lake which is almost two kilometers in length, but averages less than three hundred metres in width. As is the case for all the ponds and lakes in the park, Kathie Lake was formed in depressions between sinuous esker ridges.

Evidence gathered from interpreting old (1977) and new (1986) air photographs indicates that the ponds and lakes are being recaptured by the terrestrial landscape; i.e., they are becoming swamps and eventually solid land. In fact, within the nine year span of the air photos, one such pond has gone from being a clear water-body, to a shallow bog with vegetation growing right across its breadth.

There are no beaches on any of the lake's uplands within the park. Although there are places with suitable conditions for a beach, clearing of bush and importing of sand would need to be undertaken.

In 1985, six lakes within the park were studied by the Ministry of Environment, Fisheries Branch, to determine water quality, fish populations, spawning capability, and the ability to support fish. Neither Camp Lake, Butterfly Lake, Byers Lake, Bow Lake or Kathie Lake had any evidence of fish populations. However, they did show favorable limnological conditions to suggest they have the capability to support salmonid populations. It was suggested that fishery enhancement opportunities would be limited to a "put and take" fishery. Only Bow Lake has a potential spawning ground, located adjacent to some springs. Circle Lake, at the south end of the park does not have favorable conditions to support a fishery enhancement project. The abundance of squaw fish in the lake is the main limiting factor.

Drainage throughout the park area is mainly irregular surface runoff or sub-surface. No significant streams or creeks are evident and most of the ponds or lakes are completely separated from adjacent water bodies. There are numerous poorly drained, low lying areas in the park forming bog and marsh environments.

Vegetation Resources

The park is within the Nechako River Dry Warm Southern Sub-Boreal Spruce Sub-Zone of the Sub-Boreal Spruce Biogeoclimatic Zone. A mixture of aspen and lodgepole pine is the predominant forest cover type in the park, with some large Douglas fir in the interior of the park, and spruce showing in the south end of the park. A short growing season, with long warm days and cool nights has a selective effect on native flora, and upon the rate and volume of growth. The natural requirements call for frost-resistant flora suitable for a short growing season.

The southern exposed side of the eskers has tree cover and vegetation that, in general, is relatively sparse compared to the northern exposed side of the ridges. In fact, in numerous areas on the north side of the ridges, the immature pine is so thick that foot-travel becomes restricted. In contrast, the open, grassy slopes along the south side of the ridges are quite suitable for foot-travel.

The understory for the aspen-lodgepole pine forest is comprised primarily of kinnikinnick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), Queen's Cup (*Clintonia uniflora*), Sitka alder (*Alnus viridis* spp. *sinuata*), and various lichens and grasses. Sitka alder grows best on south facing slopes but is found to a lesser degree on slopes of all aspects.

Southern areas of the park associated with spruce communities, have slightly different understory composition. Horsetail species (*Equisetum* spp.) are common near bogs and low, poorly drained areas, and Oak fern (*Petasites palmatus*), and thimbleberry (*Rubus parviflorus*) are common-place.

No special plant communities or critical habitats which require special protection are known to exist within the park. The general state of the forest is good, with healthy, immature trees, and no signs of significant forest damage from disease, insects or other natural causes.

Fish Resources

Of the six lakes studied in the park by the Fisheries Branch (2.1, ii), only Circle Lake was found to contain significant fish populations. The most common type recovered was squaw fish, with other secondary types being Longnose suckers and White suckers. These fish are not suitable for recreational angling, and the presence of squaw fish and the large number of tributary creeks limits the stocking potential for this lake.

Camp, and Kathie Lakes were stocked with Rainbow trout in 1986 and 1987 and Byers, Bow and Butterfly Lakes were stocked with Brook trout in 1988. Most other waterbodies in the park are too small or are too swampy to support a successful fishery.

Wildlife Resources

The park area is generally a good moose wintering range, especially on the south facing slopes. Other fauna includes black bear, wolves, coyotes, mule deer, beaver, muskrats, martin, lynx. Grouse are found in significant numbers in the park, as the thick, immature pine provides an excellent habitat for them.

The lands and waters within the park have severe limitations to the production of waterfowl. The steepness of the ridges surrounding the lakes and ponds limits the development or permanency of wetlands, and optimum marsh conditions. As well, the waters are often either excessively deep or shallow, which limits the development of optimum waterfowl habitat.

Climate

Eskers Park is within the Central Interior Climatic Region, and is subject to cool to cold, snowy winters, and relatively dry, warm summers. The local climate is variable, with moist Pacific air from the southwest usually being in conflict with polar air masses from the north and northeast. The constant interaction of the two air masses results in strong temperature contrasts, cloudiness, and a succession of dry-wet weather.

Monthly Mean Temperatures (Degree C.)

<u>MONTH</u>	<u>MIN. TEMP.</u>	<u>MAX. TEMP.</u>	<u>DAILY AVE.</u>
January	-18	- 8	-13
February	-12	- 2	- 7
March	- 6	4	- 1
April	- 1	9	4
May	5	15	8
June	5	19	12
July	6	22	14
August	6	20	13
September	4	14	9
October	- 1	9	4
November	- 6	0	- 3
December	-12	- 4	- 8

The frost-free period averages between 50 to 75 days depending upon elevation, topography and aspect. The yearly average daily temperature is approximately 3 degrees celsius, and there is an annual average of 1,865 hours of sunshine.

Monthly Precipitation (cm.)

<u>MONTH</u>	<u>PRECIP.</u>	<u>SNOWFALL</u>	<u>SNOWPACK</u>
January	8.0	70	90
February	5.0	50	75
March	3.5	30	70
April	4.0	15	T
May	3.5	T	-
June	4.0	-	-
July	6.0	-	-
August	4.5	-	-
September	5.5	T	-
October	6.0	10	T
November	7.0	55	30
December	7.5	70	65

"T" indicates "trace amounts"

"Snowpack" refers to amount of snow remaining by months-end.

There is a total average of 645 mm. of precipitation over one year, averaging about 54 mm. per month, and of which, over 300 mm. is snowfall.

Visual and Outdoor Recreation Features

The most significant outdoor recreation feature of the park is the esker topography and associated lakes which provides an appealing and interesting landscape for hiking. The orientation of trails to follow the ridges as opposed to cutting across the esker ridges, would lessen the degree of difficulty associated with hiking and cross-country skiing.

The natural process where lakes become swamps and then a terrestrial landscape (hydrosere process) provides an interesting subject for visitors to the park. Trails could be developed that would pass by lakes being subjected to the hydrosere process.

Although the topography is hilly, the height of land is not significantly high to provide many horizon view points. Some knolls, however, do provide short distance views of interest.

Areas of Kathie and Camp Lakes are suitable for limited swimming in a natural setting; that is, no beach would be provided, but visitors would experience an "old fashioned swimming hole". Kathie and Camp Lakes and some of the other larger lakes in the park would also provide canoeing opportunities with short portage trails linking the lakes.

Cultural Resources

There is no documented historical or cultural evidence or sites, which pertains directly to the park area. Evidence from other areas indicates that the Carrier Indian Band originally inhabited the Stuart-Nechako-Fraser River areas, and subsisted on hunting, fishing and gathering.

Resources Analysis

The most significant park resources pertain to natural resources, and in particular, the natural landscapes and geomorphological features. Therefore, park development will be directed towards day-use activities in association with interpreting and utilizing the landscapes.

Tenures, Occupancy Rights, and Jurisdictions

No rights-of-way, occupancy rights, or inholdings occur in the park. A portion of one Big Game Guiding territory is located in the northern section of the park. Portions of four trapline territories are within the park. One territory has an active trapline within Eskers Park. An agricultural lease on the east side of the park, (that predates the park's establishment) is accessed via a portion of the road to Camp Lake.

Recreation Opportunities

A road has been constructed to Pine Marsh. The remaining section of the road to Camp Lake has been roughed in. A 6 kilometre hiking/skiing trail has been constructed from Pine Marsh to Kathie Lake, and a 1.5 kilometre beginner ski loop has been laid out near the Pine Marsh parking lot. With these improvements in place, visitors can already enjoy hiking, fishing, skiing, canoeing, picnicking, and nature appreciation in Eskers Park.

Market Analysis

The primary market for this park is the Greater Prince George area, comprising over 65,000 people. The close proximity of the park to a significant population centre makes the park ideally suited to a day-use function. The park will complement other day-use parks in the Prince George area, such as West Lake, and the Regional District Park at Ness Lake.

Appendix - The Planning Process

STAGE 1: October 1987 - January 1988

- Parks staff begin initial work to gather background information on the park area
- Detailed mapping is undertaken.
- Airphoto interpretation and field work is on-going.
- Eskers is formally designated a Class A Park in December.

STAGE 2: February 1988 - December 1988

- Study Team is formed to obtain input from special interest groups on how the park should be developed. There are representatives from the following groups:

Regional District of Fraser-Fort George
School District 57
Sons of Norway Ski Club
Northwest Brigade Canoe Club
Ducks Unlimited
Caledonia Ramblers
Polar Coachman Flyfishing Club
B.C. Horse Society
Prince George Mountain Bikers
City of Prince George, Parks and Recreation
Department
Greater Prince George Visitor and Convention
Bureau
B.C. Wildlife Federation
Special Needs Advisory Committee, City of
Prince George
Prince George Rod and Gun Club
Ness Lake Community Representative
Prince George Naturalists Club

- A draft concept plan is developed with the help of the Study Team.
- Field work is carried out with some members of the Study Team, to assess the hiking, canoeing and skiing potential of the area.
- The draft concept plan is displayed at the Prince George Public Library, and at two main shopping malls. Staff are on hand to ask questions and receive public feedback on the draft concept plan.

- Information pamphlets and comment cards are handed out at the displays.
- Comments are recorded and summarized.
- A draft Master Plan is completed.
- The public begins to use the park (fishing, hiking, etc.) even though there is no development. There is pressure placed on the park's resources, particularly the fish, and B.C. Parks responds by beginning to control unmanaged and destructive forms of access and to monitor use.
- The Study Team is consulted about beginning design and construction work on a road to Camp Lake, and trails. It is agreed that some projects could be started prior to the Master Plan being approved because they are needed to control use, and to help manage and protect the park's resources.
- Part of the road is constructed (to Pine Marsh), and trails are built to Camp and Kathie Lakes.
- Cross-country skiers and hikers enjoy the park, even though it is still in the early development phase.

STAGE 3: January 1989 - December 1989

- The draft Master Plan is released to the Prince George area public via a newspaper insert. Comments on the draft plan are requested.
- Comments from the public and the Study Team are recorded and summarized.
- Although the park is used during the winter, it is closed to vehicle access during the summer because the access road remains unfinished and a hazard to the public. The public reacts to the road closure: they ask the government to provide funding to have the road completed and opened.
- A final Master Plan is completed, incorporating the public's ideas on how the park should be developed.
- The Eskers Park Master Plan is approved by the Assistant Deputy Minister of Parks December 6, 1989.